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MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE BULLETIN

Vol. XIV

OCTOBER, 1919

No. 2

Student Difficulties

An Address at the Opening of the 120th
Year of Middlebury College
September 18, 1919

BY PRESIDENT JOHN M. THOMAS

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Middlebury College Bulletin

Vol. XIV.

OCTOBER, 1919

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ATTENDANCE OCTOBER 1, 1919

	Men	Women	Total
	1	1	2
Graduate Students,			
Seniors, - -	43	29	72
Juniors, - -	30	28	58
Sophomores, - -	45	48	93
Freshmen, - -	76	81	157
Total Enrollment,	194	186	380

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

Undergraduates Only

	Men	Women	Total
Vermont, - -	95	87	182
Massachusetts, - -	26	46	72
New York, - -	22	20	42
Connecticut, - -	18	15	33
New Jersey, - -	15	3	18
New Hampshire, - -	2	9	11
Maine, - -	5	0	5
Ohio, - -	3	0	3
Wisconsin, - -	3	0	3
Rhode Island, - -	1	1	2
California, - -	1	0	1
Delaware, - -	0	1	1
Kentucky, - -	0	1	1
Alaska, - -	0	1	1
Canada, - -	2	0	2
France, - -	1	0	1
West Indies, - -	0	2	2
	194	186	380



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STUDENT DIFFICULTIES

At this opening of the 120th year of Middlebury College I would like to say a word which might prove practically helpful in giving us a start toward the best year this institution in the Vermont green hills has ever known. We have a right to that ambition and there are some features in our situation which justify the hope and expectation that we may attain it. The war is over and we can give our minds unreservedly to the business in hand. We have notably increased our resources and are in much stronger financial position than we were a few years ago. We have a larger Faculty and I think a better one. We have not only enriched our course of study, but have improved it by the removal of arbitrary requirements which were unsuited to the needs of many students, and by the arrangement of studies in such manner as to open the mind early in the course to new departments of knowledge of greatest interest and importance. We have maintained our membership in the New England College Entrance Certificate Board and have enforced entrance requirements more strictly than ever before. We have come through a period of expansion, which has been unavoidably also a period of experiment, and we feel that we are in position to do our work in a larger and better way and with better results to all concerned. There is good ground for hope for the ambition that we may enjoy in all respects the best year our college has ever known.

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Good Intentions

I know from experience that I can assume a good purpose and an earnest resolution to make the most out of the college year, on the part of every student attending this opening. No one has come here intending to fail, or even to do half well. Conditions and make-up examinations, painful sessions with the Administration Committee at which one's future college career hangs by a thread, form no part of the anticipations of this gloriously pleasant and hopeful morning. I could carry you all with me in the presentation of high ideals and worthy standards and every one of you would assent to any pledge of earnest effort which I might recommend. There is never any trouble as to lack of good intentions and earnestly affirmed high resolutions at the outset of the year. But at mid-semester the bill for postage at the Registrar's office is increased by a multitude of solemn warnings and at the close of each examination period those eloquent notices issue in sad and grievous number. Every one of them is addressed to a student who had the best intentions at the beginning of the year.

Student Fatalities

Look at the figures of a single class. Going back to normal conditions before the war, the class of 1915 recorded 139 candidates for degrees, of which number only 72 heard the "Pro auctoritate mihi commissa" on the graduation stage. The figures are typical and might be paralleled from the records of any college. It used to be years ago that nine-tenths of the students entering received their diplomas. Read the alumni catalogue of any college today and you will find one-third of the names of recent classes—not including war classes—enrolled as non-graduates. It is one of the great failures of the modern American college not to hold its students. What is the trouble?

There are probably several contributing causes. Business opportunities are more inviting today than formerly to young people who have had only a partial course. Medical and other technical schools suggest to students two or three years of college, while only mildly recommending the attainment of a degree. Owing to the advance of standards, students are generally older when they enter and the completion of the course demands larger effort and sacrifice. Then years ago college halls were sought by much smaller numbers and almost exclusively by those who looked to some profession for which a baccalaureate degree was not merely advisable but indispensable.

The Chief Cause

But I believe the chief and principal reason for the increased fatality in college is the greatly increased complexity of college life and the large number of subsidiary interests which claim and receive so large a proportion of the student's time. Take up the Kaleidoscope, the excellent college annual published last year by the classes of '19 and '20. Page after page of societies and clubs and records of organizations, each with its officers, committees, and statement of activities. In the sketches of students note the number of offices and assignments after each name. Of course I know that many of these things are merely nominal and demand little time or interest. But others are not nominal and require a great deal of both interest and time. I can imagine a thoughtful stranger turning over the pages of that Kaleidoscope and saying—How in the name of the twenty-four hours which make up a day do those young men and women find time to study? Probably a truthful answer would be that a good many of them don't.

In all seriousness this is the most difficult problem in Middlebury College today in the matter of student life. We

are a small college and we are supporting nearly as many student enterprises as a large university. It is costing us the college life of many students who get entangled in these things and who fall behind in their studies until they get discouraged and leave. Just as serious, involvement in these outside interests is costing many able students, who manage to keep up and maintain fair averages, the privilege of that devotion and concentration in intellectual pursuits which leads to the scholar's joy and the scholar's power. Still further in the indictment, slack and slovenly work on the part of students who are giving only a modicum of their energy to the real business of college is a constant drag on the spirit of ambitious instructors who would delight in leading classes to the higher reaches of knowledge if they could only win the needful co-operation.

Legitimate Interests

How can we cure the evil? Certainly not by railing at everything outside the curriculum as out of place and harmful. A college is something more than chapel and recitations and students learn much from their association together and from the enterprises under their own management. We want athletics and general college support of them. The physical benefit of athletic sports is not confined to the participants, as is sometimes charged. The games lend a stimulus to physical training and yield an influence toward robustness of body which we all feel. This whole nation is the sounder in health because of the general love of out-door sports. It can also be urged that nothing stirs the sentiment of loyalty to the college, or does more to create the sense of unity, than contests of skill at which the whole college is in the fight. Much more might be said, but athletics are too firmly entrenched in the life of all colleges to make argument for their retention necessary.

We wish also to retain our musical organizations and to make more of them. Personally I think I could tolerate existence in Middlebury without the Jazz band, but we must make allowances for the taste of individuals. The college has done a good deal recently to stimulate interest in music and is proposing this year to do more. I wish we might become known as a singing college. I wish visitors might go from Middlebury to say—You ought to hear those students sing, in chapel, at their games, on the campus, women and men; they are always singing, and they seem to know what good music is, and to like it. That is one of the things we might do which cannot be done in a large university, whose students rarely meet. We ought to have the best chorus choir in New England in the Mead Memorial Chapel. There is no reason why we should not. We have both men and women, singing together every day, in this chapel so marvellously adapted to choral music. I trust that now we have Mr. Bissell in vocal music to assist Professor Hathaway in the music of the college, we may have a revival of musical interest which will lead to permanent results.

My remarks a moment ago should not be interpreted as unfriendly to the college band. It is very helpful to have a good band for public occasions and it is pleasant recreation for its members. The college will be glad to provide an instructor if a sufficient number of students manifest an interest to justify the expense.

Where any considerable number of people are brought together for any time, they will unvariably be found to organize themselves in separate groups or societies. It is so in cities and villages and proper that it should be so in college. Man is an organizing animal, especially at college age. Perhaps we have too many such organizations of too many kinds,

but my present point is that we are bound to have some and that, while they are liable to abuses, they are on the whole useful.

Similarly we want and ought to have a college paper and it ought to be sustained at the cost of quite a little time on the part of some students. We need and should support religious organizations, of both men and women, and should make more of them. We ought to develop our Outing Club and pay more attention to our magnificent inheritance in the Battell forests.

The Problem

I have not exhausted the list of legitimate and wholesome interests and activities outside the curriculum, but I have listed enough to make clear that every Middlebury student has a problem on his hands. I am convinced the time has come for some institutional effort to help students toward its solution. The adoption of the "point system", which I heartily commend, is a long step forward. But no system will work itself and in a matter like this especially is it true that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. Practices grow up, innocent at their beginning but encroaching more and more on student time until they become a serious evil. I have known good students to come to Middlebury, make an excellent start for a week or two, and then get so far behind during a fraternity rushing and initiation period that they did not recover for months. It is often such a trifle as that which makes the difference between success and failure. Fraternities exist for the good of the college. They can prosper only as the college prospers. They can have strong men only as they co-operate with the college in building strong men. They may be powerful influences for good, and in all friendliness but with great earnestness I urge every such organization to examine its

ways and make such changes as may be necessary, however radical they may be, in order to help and not hinder the college in the attainment of high academic ideals.

Study First

There ought to be but one engrossing interest of a college student, and that should be study. All other activities should be recreative only, and the moment they pass beyond wholesome and helpful recreation they become harmful. I wish to refer this entire subject of student activities of all sorts to the Deans of the College with the Student Life Committee and to request the hearty co-operation of all students with them. Let us look over our list of enterprises soliciting student time and abolish any which are not helpful. Let us apportion the time more carefully between the various interests. Anyone who has attended to the notices in the daily chapel must have observed that often students are invited and summoned to too many things at once. I would like to see a regular weekly calendar published by the college, monthly or even weekly, under the supervision of the Committee on Student Life, listing all meetings and appointments, and thus giving an opportunity to the Committee to rule out or postpone any call for a student's time which is not legitimate and in proportion to other duties.

But in the end it will come down to individual good sense and firmness of will. The field of knowledge which ought to be covered in a four years' course is altogether too wide to make very great diversion from the main purpose advisable. If you want to look back upon college with satisfaction and without regret, give your main thought to the official program. Ask the older graduates and note what they will tell you.

Choice of Studies

So much for extra-curriculum activities and the failures due to outside interests. I wish now to pass to matters connected with the choice of studies and the main occupation of the student. I am convinced that a large number of students fail to get the most out of college or to do their best in college because of unwise choice of studies, and that notwithstanding all our care in grouping and arranging departments and courses and the services of Faculty advisers in the selections of each semester. An instructor can only advise: he is not supposed to compel. The liberty necessary to meet the real needs of various classes of students allows a great many mistakes. Moreover an adviser can counsel only on the basis of what the student tells, and often the student presents his own needs and interests very inadequately.

One of the most common errors is undue concentration on the subject of one's major interest too early in the course. Unfortunately this is a mistake which a student of real ambition and with a definite purpose in mind is very apt to make. Let us suppose a frequent case, a student particularly interested in Chemistry. He finds the courses in that science progressively arranged and is not likely to make serious mistake in his Chemistry elections. The curriculum will not let him. But as he advances he learns that Chemistry is intimately related to other sciences, that he needs to study also Physics, Biology, and Mathematics. He discovers that he must consult chemical books and journals written in German and in French, that it is impossible to be a chemist of the first order without a reading knowledge of those languages. He finds that a chemist must also be a business man and that he will be handicapped without a knowledge of the laws of trade and finance as presented in Economics. He hears discussions of his fellow students on matters of law and

government, on questions of philosophy and religion, and realizes that his education is incomplete unless he has had at least fundamental courses in these departments. The sad part of it is that he may come to an appreciation of these needs too late. If he has not begun Biology as a Freshman or Sophomore, he cannot begin it at all. There is no time as a Junior or Senior to acquire the necessary proficiency in the modern languages. The student has lost his opportunity in some of the things he really needs because he was thinking too exclusively of his specialty and did not realize his broader needs in time.

Our program of studies is arranged on the principle of giving every student at least two years in which to begin the work of each department. The only safe counsel is to go down the list of all the departments—there are twenty of them—and inquire, Do I need any courses in that department as part of my college work? If so, when am I going to begin it? Often it will be wise to postpone a much desired subject in order to take the fundamental and prerequisite subjects in departments one cannot afford to neglect.

Beware of courses which are not prerequisite to anything, which do not lead anywhere. Such subjects are advisable only when one can see the end of his course and that they will not prevent something essential to his progress.

Theoretically perhaps all courses should be equal in difficulty and require the same proportion of the student's time. But the human element enters in with both instructor and student. It is natural for some teachers to employ a more strenuous method than others and students differ greatly in taste and capacity for different subjects. So it happens that certain courses acquire a reputation of difficulty and others come to be known as easy. The student who selects his studies on the principle of getting through as easily as possible

loses his self-respect and creates within himself a premonition of failure which time is almost sure to justify. Select your courses according to your real interests, according to your honest conviction of what you need to know for the highest development of your manhood unto the greatest possible service of your fellow-men and of God. It is easy for interest and ambition to conquer difficulty, but if you try to slip by through judicious selection of "soft snaps", you will find some thirty well-experienced instructors banded together in horrid conspiracy to prevent your success.

An Eight-Hour Day

I plead for an eight hour day and a forty-five hour week. You do not need to strike for that: your teachers will be greatly pleased if they can get that much. Normally a student has fifteen periods a week in recitation and laboratory. If now he would devote two hours beside in preparation, reading, and study in connection with each period, he would be spending 45 out of the 168 hours in a week in the main business for which he comes to college. It is less than one-fourth of the total time. Surely that ought to be a minimum. But I am convinced that it is far more than the actual average hitherto. If we could secure that standard, three hours per class, we would reduce conditions one-half and raise appreciably the academic standard of Middlebury College. I am ashamed to make this confession and you ought to be ashamed that I am forced to it. A man who essays to fit himself for leadership, who looks to some honorable calling in which he will use his mind, ought to scorn to allow himself less than the laborer's hours of work. No student has a right, in consideration of the sacrifices of money and time necessary for his education, and in consideration also of the high privileges secured for his benefit at great cost of time and labor for many generations,

to spend one moment in amusement and sport, however innocent and valuable when legitimately pursued, until he has first devoted at least one-fourth of his time to the main business of college work. Study first, then recreation, all the pleasanter for that it has been earned. Don't indulge in sport and pleasure and study what time you can catch up afterwards. That is the "slacker" attitude, that of the man who flinches in the face of duty, and it is almost as bad to be a "slacker" toward one's college as it is toward one's country.

The Scholar's Joy

We ought all to get clear beyond the border-land of success and failure, beyond all question of just getting through and saving all one's credits by not receiving more than one D and one's scholarship by not incurring two conditions,—beyond all this into the far more pleasant state where fear of failure does not even threaten, and a man works with joy and exhilaration from the very joy of learning and the thrilling sense of the growth of power. When I was a student in Middlebury, Professor Wright, my teacher and yours, assigned me several topics for independent investigation and directed me in the use of library material and the production of a thesis which should be, not a compilation from text-books and encyclopaedias, but the embodiment of my own criticism and research. I remember working for months on a topic assigned me by my Professor of Latin, Dr. James M. Paton, Cicero's Treatment of Epicurus, determining as best I could what Epicurus really taught from the fragments that have come down to us and from the presentation of his philosophy in the great poem of Lucretius, and comparing these results with the portrayal of Epicurus in the philosophical writings of Cicero. I look back upon these special outside studies, for which I received no credit, as the most valuable part of my college course.

Professor Wright has promised to be with us through the entire year. He has intimated that it must be his last year, that he feels that he has earned the right to rest after thirty-five years of service to this college, during which he has not only instructed a larger number of pupils than any man who ever taught in Middlebury, but has also borne far more than his share of administrative labor. Two Presidents have leaned on him for counsel, and neither of them but would testify that he had in Professor Wright his kindest critic and his most faithful friend. I trust that before the year is over many of you will have opportunity of his guidance in advanced studies which you pursue independently and on which you do not expect to recite.

Many other Professors will offer the same privileges. Every department is eager to find students who wish to do special work. The section of our catalogue on special honors is deserving of far more attention than it receives. Our library is not a mere collection of books: it is such a collection served by trained librarians, whose services in guidance in the use of material is more than half of the institution of the library. A student who graduates without learning how to make use of a library as an instrument in investigation is leaving without the acquisition of one of the most important benefits of a college course.

A Step Forward

One advance we are making at this time deserves especial attention. For several years past the Middlebury College Summer Session has been acquiring an increasing reputation for the excellence of its work in modern languages. The method first brought to us by Dr. Lilian L. Stroebe of Vassar College in the study of German has been extended to French and Spanish under the able leadership of Professors de Visme and Lacalle. That

method in brief has been to secure exclusive attention to the study of the one language and to organize the teachers and students into a social group, living together in a separate building and in as nearly a foreign atmosphere as possible, and maintaining the constant and exclusive use of the foreign speech in social life as well as in the classroom. Our success was evident the past summer by the attendance of representatives from twenty States and three foreign countries, including graduates from over fifty colleges and universities and many holders of advanced degrees.

It has been at least unfortunate that there has been slight connection between this Summer Session effort and the regular work of the standard academic year. We have had virtually two colleges, having little in common except that they used the same plant at different times. I am glad to say that we are now in position to remedy this situation and are today making a beginning which may be expected in good time to bring our modern language work in the college year to the same enviable position our Summer Session enjoys. Professor de Visme comes to us as head of the Division of Modern Languages and Senorita Rodriguez, one of the successful instructors at the recent Spanish School, is here as instructor in Spanish. A year hence we expect Señor Lacalle to transfer his allegiance from the U. S. Naval Academy to Middlebury as a permanent instructor. There is here the possibility of the development of a peculiar excellence in Middlebury College which may prove of great importance.

A New Officer

A college is a public institution and its executive is called upon for many duties outside its walls. There is need of an officer of the Faculty to give special attention to matters of curriculum and educational policy, to assist in internal administration on the

academic side as distinct from the work of Deans in matters of discipline and in moral and social leadership, and to have a care for the harmonious organization of the Faculty for the best work of which the college is capable. In some institutions such an officer is called the Provost. Dr. Collins has grown naturally into this work, especially in his management of the Summer Session and during my absence last year, and I am pleased to announce that the trustees have recognized his efficiency by giving him the title of Provost and designating him to the responsibilities of that office.

Professor McGilton There is one other name I must pronounce this morning and I regret that it cannot be a word of welcome back to his official duties. We shall miss again this year the active help of Professor McGilton, for twenty-seven years head of the Department of Chemistry. A teacher of enthusiasm and of power to inspire, whose ability to lead others to his own passionate love of his chosen science has long been evident in the success of our graduates in the chemical field, his absence from our laboratories will be keenly felt, but we trust we may still have the benefit of his friendly interest and counsel and that further rest may restore him to all his old-time vigor.

A Forward-Looking College Instructors and officers may come and go, but the college goes on, renewing its youth and restoring its power with each new generation. Despite her 119 years Middlebury was never more youthful, more vigorous, more fresh with new life and hope than she is today. We are a forward-looking college and our eyes are directed today to the years ahead, with their tremendous problems, their most serious responsibilities, their limitless opportunities. If I

have seemed to you this morning to be talking of trivialities on a significant occasion, it is not because I do not appreciate the seriousness of the business of training leaders for the difficult and dangerous days ahead. I have spoken of some small and petty college sins just because such trifles may stand in the way of our success in building manhood of the character and power which the present world demands. Of what use to discant on the severe tests to which the men of the future will be exposed, the great problems which await solution, if you are going to haze Freshmen, under the cover of Fraternity practices or any other cover, so that three-fourths of them cannot get a decent start! How impractical for me to discourse on the reasons for serious study in these days unless your student organizations can take up the matter of life in our college halls to the end that they be really halls of study! If I have spoken of small matters, it is because of my belief, based on experience and observation, that it is not the lack of honest purpose which thwarts the success of so many, but foolish and trifling evils of practice which we have allowed ourselves to retain from the past or to copy from other institutions. I ask a thorough revision of college customs and practices, under the leadership of your own student organizations, for the sake of the difficult trials of manhood which await you, more difficult than men before have ever known. The world today needs bigger and abler men, stronger and more capable women. In public life in thousands of positions men are crowded into places too big for them. The root of the petty politics from which this nation is suffering, and through this nation the whole world, is petty men. Every profession and every business is looking for abler men. Every city and every town is looking for them. The strain of life has become too great for the men that are available to bear it. Minds are not big enough for the work

that must be done. "You can't saw wood with a hammer" is the fine motto of one of the regiments of the old regular army. You can't build and sustain the new America and the new world with 2 x 4 stuff, and we want to fix the machinery of our college so that it will turn out material of larger dimension.

To The Class of '23 Members of the incoming class: You will be designated hereafter by the numerals of the calendar year four years hence, 1923. Let me urge you to fix your minds on that day in June of 1923 when you will receive the diploma certifying to the success of the work you now begin. Plan your course on the basis of a four year program. Get the fundamentals at the start so that the later years may be full of enjoyment and reward. Avoid all accumulation of handicaps by way of early failures and careless habits of work which it will be difficult to overcome. Success will come easily, if you make the right start.

If we do not altogether succeed in purging our customs in one year from all practices that are harmful, instead of resolving to duplicate them when your turn comes, purpose rather to help change them when you reach a stage of greater influence. Help us to build a better college, of higher standard and fairer name. We love Middlebury: we want you to love her too. From this day, because you will be part of Middlebury, all the honor and richness of her past belong to you. It is a noble inheritance: see that you are worthy of it.

I now declare you duly matriculated students of Middlebury College and members of the class of 1923.



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